

THE IMPORTANCE OF EXALTING THE INTELLECTUAL SPIRIT
OF THE NATION; AND NEED OF A LEARNED CLASS.

A DISCOURSE

PRONOUNCED

BEFORE THE PHI SIGMA NU SOCIETY
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT.

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TO THE MEMBERS OF THE PHI SIGMA NU SOCIETY
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT,
THIS DISCOURSE, PRONOUNCED IN THEIR
PRESENCE, AND PUBLISHED AT THEIR REQUEST,
IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED.

“——While the employment of the mind upon things purely intellectual is to most men irksome, whereas the sensitive powers by our constant use of them acquire strength—the objects of sense are too often counted the chief good. For these things men fight, and cheat and scramble.

“Therefore in order to tame mankind and introduce a sense of virtue, the best human means is to exercise their reason, to give them a glimpse of a world superior to the sensible ; and while they take pains to cherish and maintain the animal life, to teach them not to neglect the intellectual.”

DISCOURSE.

I feel myself honoured by the invitation that has drawn me here to-day. It is the first time in my life that I visit these seats of learning ; but I am glad there are other associations than those of sight, which banish the sense of strangeness, and pleasantly awaken the feeling of home. The Society at whose request I come is itself a portion of a much larger community—the great Brotherhood of Scholars—composed of all those who are animated by a common love of good letters ; and these Academic seats are, if I may be allowed the expression, one of the fair Chapters of our Order, where the humblest of its members may be sure of a Brother's welcome. Festivals like this we hold to-day have a natural influence to quicken the scholarly spirit, and to brighten the golden chain that unites the disciples of Letters. Laying aside the cares of ordinary life, we meet together as scholars, to indulge in the free communication of those sympathies that are common to the lovers of good learning. The occasion has naturally suggested to me as a subject of remark—the importance of drawing closer together the bonds of broth-

erhood among the lovers of letters, and of more earnest exertions to exalt the intellectual spirit of the nation.

It seems to me there are some peculiar considerations connected with the condition of our country, that render it exceedingly desirable and important, no less for the welfare of the country generally, than for the more immediate interests of Truth and Learning, that a loftier tone, and a livelier sympathy, should pervade and connect the whole body of those who either are themselves engaged in the higher pursuits of Science and Letters, or appreciate the worth and value of such pursuits. In this country, while intellectual activity, in its higher departments, is, on the one hand, not favoured by some causes that exist elsewhere, it is, on the other hand, positively repressed by many unfriendly influences, that are either peculiar to our country, or work in a peculiar degree. It seems needful, then, to cast about for something to supply what is wanting, and to counteract what is injurious;—to give a quickened impulse, a higher flight, and a wider reach to intellectual exertion;—and to work such a change in the state of opinion and direction of the public resources, as shall secure to the loftier pursuits of Truth, Beauty and Letters, those fostering influences of which they are now so sadly destitute.

Whether or not these results, in any sufficient degree, can be fairly hoped for, they are still objects attractive to the imagination and to the wishes; and at all events we shall find it interesting to survey the present state of cultivation in our country, and the influences that affect it.

We have among us no LEARNED ORDER of men. I use the expression for its convenient brevity, not meaning by it merely those who are devoted to the pursuits of Learning in the strict sense of the word, but also all those who give their lives to intellectual inquiry and production in any of the higher departments of Science and Letters. We have a most respectable body of educated men, some of them engaged in the applications of science to the arts of life, but most of them exercising the different public professions. Whether or not they are all adequately appreciated and rewarded, still we have such a class, employed in working with, combining and applying—in explaining, communicating, and diffusing, the knowledge already possessed. But in addition to these we want an order of men devoted to original inquiry and production, who without reference to the more palpable uses of knowledge shall pursue truth for its own sake. We need a class of men whose lives and powers shall be exclusively given to exploring the higher spheres of knowledge, opening new

sources of Truth and Beauty, increasing the amount and extending the domain of Science. We need an order of men who may be free to leave the mists and the vapours that settle upon the low grounds of the earth, and getting themselves up into the mountaintops, may dwell there in a serene and lofty seclusion, alike from the goading of life's cares, and from the feverish stir and strife of its coarse and beggarly elements; and in the clear air beholding with pure and tranquil heart "the bright countenance of Truth," may catch and reflect its divine spirit to all times. In short, we want an order of men, surrounded with all needful appliances, and left with a free mind to follow the impulses of their nature in the highest spheres of science and letters.

Such an order of men is a component part of every sound and perfect body politic. It is indispensable to its highest welfare. "Man liveth not by bread alone," any more as a nation than as an individual.

We live by Admiration, Hope, and Love,
And even as these are well and wisely fixed,
In dignity of being we ascend.—WORDSWORTH.

National well-being consists in the developement of the proper humanity of a nation—in the cultivation and exercise of the reason and moral nature, and in the subordination to these of all the lower principles. It is found in the wisdom, the intellectual elevation, and the virtuous energy of a people; and of

these, the light of pure and lofty science is the quickening impulse and the genial nutriment. All pure and elevated truth is in itself good, and it does good. It is of God, and it leads to God again. Without its noble inspiration we may indeed serve the turn of this world's lowest uses ;—we can gain money, grow fat and die ;—but we are not fit for the better ends even of this world. “He,” says Bishop Berkeley, “who hath not meditated much upon God, the human soul, and its chief good, may possibly make a shrewd and thriving earth-worm, but he will indubitably make a blundering patriot and a sorry statesman.” As the well-being of individuals is in proportion to the culture and right exertion of those rational and moral faculties which mark and distinguish our humanity, so the welfare of a nation requires that the select number of those who are endowed with pre-eminent gifts of intellectual power, should be left free, with all observance and respect attending them, to follow those inward promptings of their nature which mark their true vocation—their mission on the earth—the promotion of God's glory by seeking and exploring the highest sources of truth and beauty, for the honour and instruction of their country. Such minds should, in the noble language of Milton, “have liberty in the spacious circuits of their musing, to propose to themselves whatever is of highest hope and hardest attempting,” whether in “beholding the

bright countenance of Truth, in the quiet and still air of delightful studies," or as "poets soaring high in the region of their fancies, with their garlands and singing robes about them." "These abilities," he goes on, "wheresoever they be found, are the inspired gifts of God, rarely bestowed, but yet to some in every nation, and are of power, beside the office of a pulpit, to imbue and cherish in a great people the seeds of virtue and public civility, to allay the perturbations of the mind, and set the affections in a right tune."

A learned order is, moreover, one of the *conservative powers* of a nation, necessary in order to check the undue predominance of the more gross and material elements.—In this country it is peculiarly necessary to counteract the overgrowth and dangerous tendencies of the commercial and political spirit. The overgrowth of these influences in other countries is checked not only by venerable institutions both of Religion and of Learning, but also by ancient dignities, more imposing forms of government, and various other causes which have no place in this country. The only counteracting influences that can be brought to bear in this country against the undue love of wealth and politics, are RELIGION and LETTERS; and religion, left as it is to take care of itself, will be entirely inadequate, unless the intellectual spirit of the nation be elevated by high and pure letters.

There is no theme so much a favourite amongst us as the glorious career and magnificent destiny of our country. Our presses teem with gorgeous visions of the future. It is the subject of popular declamation through the length and breadth of the land. The public mind has been too much dazzled by these brilliant pictures. It is comparatively a small thing that we have drawn upon ourselves the sneers of other nations, who from a distance are more calmly watching the progress of our history. Nor is it the chief evil that comes of indulging these self-pleasing fancies, that they foster an overweening national pride. The greatest danger is, that we shall fall into the habit of looking upon it as a settled and inevitable thing that we are to become not only the largest and richest, but the freest, wisest, and happiest nation on the globe, while we entirely forget the *conditions* on which, after all, our national prosperity is suspended. In the confident tone of these predictions, it seems to be forgotten that the true interests and permanent welfare of our nation can be secured only by maintaining ourselves in harmony with the universal and invariable Laws of the moral world. It seems to be forgotten that there are causes, in active operation at this moment, quite as powerful to work our downfall as to secure our greatness.

I have alluded to the dangerous predominance of two elements in our country. The one is the *love of*

money. Our national character is eminently distinguished, and in the view of other nations disgraced, by this trait. The whole mass of society, from the top to the bottom, is heaving with the restless struggle for gain. It takes, indeed, in many of its manifestations, a cast of grandeur, from the energy it calls forth, and the vastness of the schemes it employs itself upon. The boundless physical resources of the country are unfolding with unparalleled rapidity. The din and bustle of internal improvement is ringing from one end of the land to the other. The country is growing rich beyond all computation; and almost every man in the country is hasting to be rich. Now it is not necessary to quarrel with this development of the physical resources of our land. But it is necessary to be aware of the corresponding dangers it brings, and to guard against them. It is needful to feel that national wealth is by no means necessarily national well-being; that merely to be rich no more makes the proper well-being of a nation, than of an individual. On the contrary, the natural tendency of excessive wealth is to luxury, and private and public corruption. It contains the germ of every evil; and unless checked and sanctified by higher and happier influences, is sure to degrade a nation—to blast its prosperity, and work its ruin. This is a truth, of which all history is an impressive demonstration. It is not necessary to quarrel with

the natural desire of acquisition ; but it is necessary to guard against its excess, and to keep subordinate to its proper ends. In this country it is excessive. It is restless, insatiable, boundless—unhallowed and unredeemed by better influences, by a superior and pervading respect and love for higher and nobler objects. For along with this increase of wealth has come a prodigious growth of luxury—an infinite multiplication of the means and refinements of physical enjoyment ; and we are hurrying on with prodigious strides to a state of excessive *civilization*, without due *cultivation*—of luxurious indulgence and the refinements of pleasure, without a proportionate growth of intellectual and moral culture, without a lively and respectful regard for the less material and less vulgar interests of life.

In such a state of things, the morals of a nation, and the tone of society, cannot but be injuriously affected. Unhappily these evils are but too visible. The use of a single word sometimes tells much in regard to the moral tone of a nation. Is not a sad state of moral feeling betrayed in a country where *wealth*—that good old-English word, designed to express the total sum of the elements of well-being, including all that relates to man's higher nature and wants—has come to mean nothing but *money* ; and where *worth* is used to tell *how much* a man has ? Yet so it is. Mr. Wilkins hath a hundred thousand dollars, and he is *worth* five times

as much as Mr. Johnson, who hath but twenty thousand, while Mr. Thompson hath none, and is *worth nothing*. Throughout the country the great majority of the mass of the people have a profound reverence for nothing but money. Public office is a partial exception. And why should it be otherwise? They see nothing else so powerful. Riches not only secure the material ends of life—its pleasures and luxuries; but they open the way to all the less material objects of man's desire—respect and observance, authority and influence.

In the mean time the tone of society is debased. The *luxury* of mere riches is always a vulgar luxury. It is external, and devoid of good taste. It always goeth about feeling its purse. It counteth the fitness and propriety of its appointments by the sum they cost. It calleth your attention to its glittering equipage, and saith it ought to be of the first style, for it cost the highest price. It receiveth you to its grand saloons, and wisheth you to mark its furniture. It inviteth you to its table, and biddeth you note the richness of its plate, and telleth you the price of its wines.—The *fashion* of mere riches is also a vulgar fashion. The butterfly insignificance of its life is not even adorned by the graceful fluttering of its golden wings. It is quite possible to have the extravagance and frivolity of fashionable life, without the ease and grace, the charms of wit and spirit, and the elegance

of mind and manners, that in other countries often adorn its real nothingness, or cover up the coarse workings of jealousy and pretension.

Such must always be the tendency of things where the commercial spirit acquires an undue predominance—where the excessive and exclusive love of money is not repressed by appropriate counter-checks.—In some countries these checks to the overgrowth of the commercial spirit are sought for in venerable institutions of religion and letters, in habits of respect for established rank, and above all by throwing a considerable portion of the property into such a train of transmission, as that it becomes the appendage and ornament of something that appeals to the higher sentiments, something that is held in greater respect than mere riches, and with the possession of which is connected high and dignified trusts—a high education, and the culture and habit of all lofty and generous sentiments. This is unquestionably the *idea* lying at the ground of the English aristocracy, in the theory of the English constitution. Hence inalienable estates, belonging not to the man, but to the dignity; where the wealth is designed to be only the means of sustaining and adorning the dignity—of fulfilling its proper trusts—and of upholding those high interests of the country, of which the possessor of the dignity is but the representative; and where habits of education from generation to generation are

designed to teach and impress the value of many other things above mere wealth, and to connect with the possession and use of riches honorable sentiments, liberal culture, and the disposition to respect and promote the cultivation of high science and letters, and all the more spiritual elements of social well-being. And strong as are our prejudices in this country, it may at least be questioned, whether a fair estimate of the evils on both sides, would not show that such an aristocracy is in many respects preferable to that which otherwise will and must predominate—the aristocracy of new riches, where the elements of society are in perpetual fluctuation, where the coarse pretensions of lucky speculators, and the vulgar struggles of all to get up, leave little room for the feeling of repose and respect.*

* I was struck with the following passage in a recent well written and agreeable book entitled "*Sketches of Switzerland.*" Speaking of the society at Paris, the writer had introduced an anecdote illustrating the simplicity of manners that characterized the celebrated Duke de Valmy; he then adds, "But I could fill volumes with anecdotes of a similar nature; for in these countries, in which men of illustrious deeds abound, one is never disturbed in society by the fussy pretension and swagger that is apt to mark the presence of a lucky speculator in the stocks.

"I have already told you how little sensation is produced in Paris by the presence of a celebrity, though, in no part of the world is more delicate respect paid to those who have earned renown, whether in letters, arts or arms. Like causes, however, notoriously produce like effects; and I think, under the new *regime*, which is purely a money-power system, directed by a mind whose ambition is wealth, that one really meets here more of that swagger of stocks and lucky speculations in the world, than was formerly the case. Society is decidedly less graceful, more care-worn, and of a worse tone to-day, than it was previously to the revolution of 1830."

The other principal element of danger to our country is the *strife of party politics*. The structure of our government, with all its advantages, is attended with some peculiar perils. We are apt, however, to be deluded by an extravagant opinion of the efficacy of our *form* of government in securing the welfare of the nation. But there is no charm in a form of government. Government is but the condition under which the destiny of a people is wrought out for good or for evil by the people themselves. The freest government is the one that is exposed to the greatest perils; if it does not work well, it must work worse than others. Our form of government pre-supposes that the *capacity* of self-government is commensurate with the *right*; consequently it is fit for us no longer than we are fit for it. Universal suffrage in the hands of an unenlightened and corrupt people is like deadly weapons in the hands of a madman. You can give the people the right of ruling only on supposition that they will rule well. But it is not a thing to be taken for granted that a majority can do no wrong or foolish things. The doings of a majority will never be a whit wiser or better than the wisdom and virtue of the individuals that compose it. The great question then obviously is: Whether the people at large are so enlightened and virtuous, that the present will of a majority, will, in the long run, always be an expression of what is wisest and best for the nation,—or at least,

a truer expression of it than can be had in any other way? It is no acceptable doctrine now-a-days to deny this. But taking human nature as it is given in history and experience, I must be permitted to doubt whether it is safe to assume it. Speaking abstractly, and without reference to any party, I must be permitted to avow the conviction that the majority of the wisdom and virtue of any country, which, for the good of the country, ought to rule, will always be most likely to have its proper influence, where the present will of a mere numerical majority is restrained and limited. Such is the theory of our constitution, and such the design of many of its provisions. But the democratic element of our government has acquired a predominating force never dreamed of by its framers. The constitutional checks upon the popular will have proved inadequate to preserve the intended balance, at least they have lost their hold upon the acquiescence of the people. It is an odious thing at the present day for any one to speak of the right or the necessity of checking the popular will. The President's constitutional right of *veto*—the independence of the Senate—and the inviolability of the Supreme Court, have all by turns been the objects of popular hatred and popular threats. Add to this the shape which the doctrine of the "right of instruction" is coming daily more and more to assume in the popular feeling;—a feeling that goes nigh to

strip the members of the national legislature of the character of trusted legislators for the people, whose duty it is to act according to their best judgment and discretion, for the good of the nation,—and to make them a mere formal board to register the determinations that come up from the primary assemblies of a thousand local districts. It is not necessary here to draw the line exactly between what is right and what is wrong in this feeling; it is adverted to only to show the increasing tendency of the people to hold exaggerated and exclusive views on every subject involving the question of popular power.*

Whatever dangers grow out of this, are a thousand

* It is impossible to lay down any propositions in absolute terms on this point. It is certainly the theory of our constitution that the people are wise enough to choose men to be their Legislators and Statesmen; but it does not follow that they are wise enough to be legislators and statesmen themselves. Nobody is born a legislator or statesman, and it is equally absurd to suppose the mass of the people can ever become such. Besides, the absolute and unqualified assertion of the right of instruction would involve the greatest inconveniences and absurdities. For the right which is exerted in one case, may be exerted in every other case: and the *consequences* would be such as were certainly never contemplated by the constitution. On the other hand, it seems implied in the spirit of our government, that the deliberate sense of the community on great and general questions should be regarded by their representatives; and there seems no particular objection to its being expressed in the shape of instructions. This is probably all that moderate and enlightened holders of the right of instruction care to maintain. But it is none the less true that the tendency of popular feeling goes far beyond this, exaggerating it to an absolute and unqualified right. The root of this and every other instance of the undue predominance of the democratic spirit, is in radically false and absurd notions of the grounding principles of government, and particularly in the prevalent confusion of *civil* with *natural* rights. In fact the people of this country are politically educated in nothing but a false and overweening sense of *rights*.

fold increased by the unlimited extension of suffrage. Not contented with giving the right to all the native born of our own land, without any provision to exclude those whose ignorance unfits them, or whose necessities expose them to corruption,—we extend it to all the vagabonds that come to us from other lands. The oppressed and degraded, the idle and ignorant, the broken in fortune and fame, the outcasts of Europe, throng to our shores by hundreds of thousands yearly—to find here not merely asylum and protection, but to find themselves enrolled side by side with the sons of the land, and possessed of equal right to control the destinies of the nation. Without property or other stake in the welfare of the country; without wisdom to exercise their new rights, and without a serious conviction of the duties those rights impose—they become fit dupes for the party demagogue, bartering often their venal vote for the means of an hour's intoxication!

With the progress of all these changes the *spirit of party* has progressively increased. Our country in some respects offers the finest arena in the world for the political demagogue. It was long ago apprehended by wise men as a possible thing, that a knot of party demagogues, under the name of “friends of the people,” might have it all their own way, and rule and ruin the people with the people's own consent. It remains to be seen. Be the event what it may,

certainly the licentiousness of the party press has risen to a tremendous height. Nothing is sacred or secure. The strongest stimulants are constantly administered to the worst passions of the people, and particularly to the prejudices and passions of that portion of the people who rarely read but one side,—commonly believe all that is told them by the accredited organs of their respective parties, and always believe what flatters their self-love. “It is the iniquity of men,” says Jeremy Taylor, “that they suck in opinion as the wild asses do the wind, without distinguishing the wholesome from the corrupted air, and then live upon it at a venture.”—These dangers are a hundred fold increased from the mode and the frequency of filling the highest office in the nation. The country has no rest from one four years’ end to another, in preparing for these so frequently recurring struggles. Its remotest corners are agitated; its quietest nooks are disturbed with the harsh conflict of opinions;—while all over the land, pestilent hordes of hungry office-seekers are stirring up the strife, ringing changes upon popular watchwords, and exciting the passions of the people. Why is all this? Because the patronage and power of the President of the United States is far greater than that of most kings. I do not advert to this, in order to quarrel with the fact: my only object here is to ask if it would not be far better if some mode of filling the office were fallen upon, that should

leave it more to the action of Providential agency; render the man who fills it less dependent upon a party; surround him in a greater degree with less material, and more moral responsibilities; and thus leave him more free to be the head of the nation, and not of a party.*

Not only is there an undue predominance of the democratic element, subject to all the corrupting in-

* Hereditary succession is not here intended; but some mode of filling the executive office that may avoid the evils of frequent popular elections. In this country an astonishing prejudice prevails among the mass of the people on the whole subject of government—as if *freedom* of government were essentially and exclusively connected with certain names and forms. It needs however but little knowledge of history to show that freedom may exist under the names and forms of monarchy: while with all the names and forms of a republic, a nation may be enslaved.—In regard to filling the executive, the problem—like every other problem in the general theory of government—is to fix upon the *best* mode where no mode is perfectly unexceptionable, that is, to fix upon the mode which is attended with the fewest evils. Where the executive is *elective for life*—as was the case in Poland—the evils of frequent elections—continual struggle and agitation, are avoided; but the conflict is fiercer and more dangerous when it does occur. To avoid altogether the evils of elections, the executive office in some constitutional governments—as in France and England—is made hereditary. In this case reliance is placed upon education and various other influences, to secure the requisite fitness for office; yet this mode, though in the opinion of the writer less exceptionable than frequent popular elections, is attended with obvious liabilities to evil. Is it allowable to suggest a mode that might perhaps be found to combine more advantages and fewer evils for our country than any other? Suppose there were a given term of Senatorial office longer, say, than the present; upon the expiration of which, those who had served through it, should fall into a grade of *Senatores Emeriti*—a retired class;—out of whom, one should be taken every four or six years, by lot or by rotation, or by some similar mode of designation, to be the President of the United States. In this way, the evils of popular election would be avoided; private ambition, and rival competition in a great degree excluded; while, on the other hand, the individual upon whom the office might fall, would be likely to be every way as suitable a person as can be secured by the present mode.

fluences of a virulent party press ; but can any sober mind fail to see many proofs and indications that the popular spirit is tending towards the licentious anarchy of MOB DOMINATION ? OF LIBERTY WITHOUT LAW AND PUBLIC ORDER ?—Whenever, in any country, it fully comes to this, it is no matter of mere speculation that a people can inflict upon themselves a thousand-fold more curses than the most iron despotism. History has set its seal to this truth forever. That such will never be our fate is devoutly to be hoped ; and there are some grounds of good hope. They are found in the degree in which knowledge and virtue do actually prevail in the nation ; in the wide extent of the country ; the want of a great controlling metropolis, and in the distinction of State governments and State rights. Moreover, there is reason to hope that the influence of an ever watchful minority in opposition, may be sufficient to counteract the destructive tendencies of unrestrained democracy. Giving all weight, however, to these considerations, it still remains beyond a doubt that the increasing love of office, the spirit of party, and the profligacy of the party press, furnish ground of reasonable alarm ; and every good man and lover of his country must desire to see these evils diminished.

I have spoken with freedom upon this great subject. The intention of this discourse might perhaps have been sufficiently attained, by simply adverting

to the overgrowth of certain mercantile and political elements, as effecting the cause of letters and the welfare of the country. But in following the train of my own thoughts I have been led to speak also incidentally—though I confess more at large than I intended—upon some points in the *theory and working* of our government, and to intimate opinions from which I am aware that many enlightened men dissent. As to this, I can only say, that without reference to any particular party, and without any disrespect for the opinions of others, I have frankly expressed my own honest convictions. Whether the particular views that have been intimated concerning the theory and working of our government are right or wrong; and whether the tendencies to evil, are, or are not, as great as have been supposed; still every enlightened man must admit, that there is no form of human government but is incident to some peculiar class of evils;—that the dangerous tendencies of every democratic government are such as have been spoken of; and that where the love of wealth and of party politics is advancing, as with us, to such a prodigious overgrowth,—there, to secure the conservation of the State, ought the higher and more spiritual elements of national well-being to be proportionably powerful and active. It is not, then, in the idle and arrogant spirit of mere fault-finding, that we have spoken things so little likely to be gratifying to our self-love.

The evils to which we are exposed have been pointed out, in order that we may more earnestly look for the means of conservation.

What then are the means of conservation? What are the counter-checks that will secure the safety of an intensely commercial and democratic State? They are RELIGION AND LETTERS. It is not my intention here to speak particularly of what religion can do as a conservative power in a nation. It may be observed however, in passing, that while religion influences the character of a people, it is itself likewise always modified by the people—by the institutions and spirit of the country. In a country intensely democratic, where religion has no fixed and settled institutions, but is left, like every thing else, to the determination of the popular will, may we not suppose it will receive a peculiar cast and direction? Where the intellectual energies of the people are not at all meditative—turned within, but all projected outward, concentrated upon the palpable objects of material utility; where all is excitement and conflict, agitation and intensity; will not religion be likewise subject to a corresponding form of development and action? Will not its tone and the direction of its influence be in continual fluctuation? Will there not be a restless craving for religious novelty and excitement? Will not its teachers find it hard to preserve the independence of

their sacred functions? Will they not be exposed to the alternative of losing their influence, or of becoming passive weather-cocks to obey and indicate the evershifting direction of the popular gale? Will not the people everywhere call out for preaching “suited to the spirit of the age”?—not meaning by it preaching suited to correct and amend the spirit of the age; but, agreeable to the taste of the age; for this mighty “spirit of the age,” like every thing else belonging to the supreme people, never thinks itself capable of being in the wrong, or needing correction. It demands an applauding echo, not a rebuke. Is there no danger that this “spirit of the times,” so enlightened in its own esteem, and so wanting in reverence for every thing but itself, instead of submitting to be met, checked, and corrected, by the whole, undivided, old-fashioned gospel, will lay sacrilegious hands upon it—and tearing a portion of its more external truths and applications live asunder from the living whole and from their inward and spiritual grounds—will mould and narrow and concentrate the whole of religion upon an everchanging succession of objects of external and material reform—hurrying forever onward in a restless career of fierce fanaticism?

Before you answer these questions, look to that part of the country from whence have sprung and spread some of the most remarkable religious developments of the age; and where too, it is to be noted,

have been shown the most remarkable spectacles the world has ever seen of intense activity on the grandest scale, exerted for the physical ends of life—rooting out forests, building up city after city, carrying forth roads and canals, and growing rich, as by the magic ministry of Aladdin's lamp.

In a country like ours then, where the democratic and commercial elements are so intense, it cannot be expected that religion will exert an adequate conservative influence; *unless the intellectual tone of the people can be exalted.* It is the office of Religion to diminish, by her views of eternal things, a too intense and absorbing devotion to the gross and material objects of life; but she will battle it unequally, unless she is aided by causes that shall excite and cherish a taste and respect for the higher and more intellectual objects and enjoyments of the present life.

Let us then turn to LETTERS, as the other conservative element of the state—and the necessary complement of the former. In this aspect of our country, we find, in some parts, public schools, a press teeming with popular works, and a body of teachers and writers actively engaged in communicating and diffusing existing knowledge. We will not stop to dwell at length upon defects in all this. We might show how the system of education, established among us, tends in some important respects, not so much to quicken intellectual power, and to form decided intel-

lectual tastes, as to furnish the modicum of knowledge necessary to enable our youth to rush upon the arena of life and play their part in the great struggle for wealth or office. We might show how the continual multiplication of works like most of our popular productions tends to create a vague and superficial knowledge, which serves rather as a substitute for thinking than to invigorate the powers of thought; and how the mind even of the commonest reader gets more good from grappling with one master-mind, and by patient, strenuous self-exertion, fathoming the depth of one master-work, than by skimming forty volumes of "Familiar Elements," and similar fourth-rate productions that are continually coming forth.* We might point out some indications of a morbid taste in the present reading public, which require a higher tone of literature to correct. But let whatever there is of letters among us be accepted as good; and surely it is very good in comparison with having nothing of the kind, or even—some exceptions being made—with having less of it; for it tends to the diffusion of

* "What the youth of a nation needs," says Cousin, "are thorough and profound works, such even as are something abstruse and difficult; in order that they may get the habit of encountering and overcoming difficulties and serve as it were an apprenticeship to fit them for life and its labour. It is a sad thing to deal out to them only slight general notions in such a form that a child of five years old may learn and recite the whole book in a day from beginning to end, and imagine it knows something of human nature and the world. Not so should it be. Strong minds are made by strong studies," &c. *Cours de la Phil.* V. I. Lec. 11.

knowledge—a thing essential to the welfare of the country, so it be sound and wholesome knowledge; still it is obvious to remark that the diffusion of knowledge is not its advancement. Carrying the streams all over the land is not keeping the fountains fresh and full. The teachers—those engaged in simplifying and communicating existing knowledge—can have but little time for increasing its amount. They can have but little time, even if they have the intellectual power, to explore the fountain heads, to enlarge them, to open new and fresh springs. Yet this is needed; otherwise the streams are likely to get dry and stale.

We need then an order of men—of lofty intellectual endowment, of original creative power, exclusively devoted to the highest departments of Truth, Beauty and Letters; an intellectual High Priesthood, standing within the inner veil of the Temple of Truth, reverently watching before the Holy of Holies for its divine revelations, and giving them out to the lower ministers at the altar;—thus teaching the teachers, enlarging their intellectual treasures, exalting their intellectual spirit, and through them instructing and elevating the whole body of the people. This lofty style of letters, as we have said, is good in itself. It is good as a component part of the common weal. It is good too—it is indispensably necessary—as a coun-

teracting power to the predominant evils that have been displayed.

But how shall a learned order be created? The very state of things that renders it most needful, not only fails to create it, but is adverse to it. Politics and business, public life and commercial enterprise, absorb the greatest portion of the best energies of the nation. The public will never create it. The public will pay for a cheap and inferior style of letters. The public will pay only for what it comprehends the value of; it cannot comprehend the value of a Plato, a Bacon, a Michael Angelo, a Newton, a La Place; it will not support them. It will not even respect and honor them while alive, unless it sees them surrounded with other titles to their reverence than those which come from the nature and value of their labours—unless it sees them honoured by the State. Centuries after they are dead, from the tardy prevalence of right opinion in the higher quarters, the multitude may come to have a vague impression that they are great names, not to be mentioned without respect.

It is a sad reflection, how comparatively solitary and uncheered by sympathy and respect, even in the best condition of society, is the path of a truly great and original mind—especially when devoted to the

more profound and spiritual investigations of truth. As Coleridge says of some such one, they stride so far ahead of their age that they are *dwarfed* by the distance. It is perhaps one of the penalties of greatness—one of the abatements in the equal orderings of Providence, from the enviableness of such high gifts. The fate of BACON is an impressive case in point. The name of BACON is now a word of reverence in the mouths of tens of thousands of the multitude, who have never indeed read a line of his philosophical works, and know nothing of their contents, unless perhaps they may have skimmed the outlines of his great work in the “Library of Useful Knowledge,” or gleaned some crude notions from more casual sources. Few are aware, however, that in his own days, and among his own countrymen, his philosophical labours were not only not understood and esteemed, but depreciated and ridiculed—and that not merely by the courtiers and men of the world, but by the men of genius who ought to have comprehended the new sources opened to them. The shallow witticism of the “pedant king” on his great work—“*that like the peace of God it passed all understanding*”—was but the key-note of the whole symphony of the times. Well was it for Bacon, that he could sustain his mighty spirit by keeping the “TIMES SUCCEEDING” ever before his mind; and in

his last legacy “leave his name and his memory to foreign nations and to his own countrymen *after some time be passed over.*”* This is not a solitary instance. The history of literature is full of similar cases ; but we cannot stop to signalize them. A most eminent instance, in our own age, might be pointed out, in the “myriad-minded” COLERIDGE—a man of most surpassing intellectual greatness, wonderful alike for every kind of learning, and for every kind of creative power. He was indeed valued and revered by a few—the elect spirits of the age—and among them some of the highest and brightest names of our times, whose verdict is prophecy, whose applause is fame ; but by the great body of his cotemporaries he lived neglected and depreciated, and in his last years was obliged to leave imperfect the great work of his life, while he humbled his intellect to the petty tasks of hackney writing to gain his daily bread. But neither have I time, nor dare I attempt, to make his fitting eulogy. SUCCEEDING TIMES will do him justice, and vindicate his titles to the reverential homage of his country and mankind.

In a country where commercial enterprise and public life absorbs such a disproportionate share of the strongest energies of mind, it is rare to find the men of the world, even the best of them, adequately ap-

* See D’Israeli’s *Curiosities of Literature*, 2d Series.

preciating the value, and respecting the labours of men of genius. “These men of strong minds, but limited capacities,” as D’Israeli says, are rather inclined “to hold in contempt all studies alien to their own habits.” This which has ever been to a great extent the tendency, even in the most favourable condition of things, is from the peculiar state of our country, eminently the tendency with us. Where shall we look in our political and commercial world at the present day, for such men as CICERO, uniting literary and philosophical tastes and labours with public affairs; or the magnificent LORENZO DE MEDICI, distinguished at once as poet, and lover and cultivator of philosophy and art, as well as the great merchant and head of the State—gathering around him the choicest literary spirits of the age; loving them; cheering and quickening their zeal by public honours and rewards; and in his intervals of leisure from affairs, living with them in genial communication on the highest themes of truth and beauty:

—Non de villis, domibusve alienis,
Nec, male, nec ne, lepus saltet. Sed quod magis ad nos
Pertinet, et nescire malum est:

—————Utrumne
Divitiis homines, an sint virtute beati?
Et quo sit natura boni; summum que ejus.

HORACE Sat. L. II. 6, 71.

Neither by the public then, nor by individuals, in the present state of things, can we expect that a body

of high and original cultivators of truth and letters, will be adequately sustained or respected.

But it may be thought that men of genius should be sustained by the sentiment of Duty, and the consciousness of their high Vocation;—by a calm and lofty Confidence in the verdict of “succeeding times;” and above all, by the ever fresh impulse of that Love of truth and letters *for their own sake*, without which no external motives will avail to call forth great and noble works. It is indeed true that no one is worthy the name of philosopher, poet, or artist, who regards the pursuit of truth and beauty, as mere means to earthly and private ends. Such a feeling would of itself sufficiently betray that the genial power of high production—the true *mens divini*—had never stirred within them. It is the remark of FUSELI, that no great and genuine work of art was ever produced where the artist did not love his art for its own sake; and the remark applies to every branch of science and letters.* All the master-works of the mind must

* I cannot resist the inclination to mention the circumstances in which I first saw this remark of Fuseli. It was in the studio of my friend ALLSTON, to which I had been invited—a privilege rarely extended to any one—to see a picture he had just finished. The sentence from Fuseli was written in pencil on the door of a cabinet, and beneath it was another exquisite thought by Allston himself: “He who loves his art for its own sake, will be delighted with excellence wherever he sees it, as well in the work of another as in his own. This is the test of true love.” This is beautiful, and beautifully expressed,—and what is pleasanter still, it is just an expression of the true disposition of that most amiable man and ornament of our country’s art.

be the genial production of those who find their labours their own "exceeding great reward." External motives can never bestow inward power. True love alone quickens creative energy. He who can be drawn to labour in the cause of truth and letters only by the earthly rewards of money and honour, will never do any thing worthy of reward.

All this however by no means proves that such rewards are not needed in order to give free and unrestrained scope to the action of more genial impulses. The man of genius must have a livelihood. However sincere his love of truth, beauty, and letters, for their own sake—however glorious his energies—however strong the inward impulse to high and noble production, he may be pressed down by the force of external circumstances. The necessity of providing for the wants of to-morrow by the cares of to-day, may forbid his giving himself up to the objects of his love. The votary of high truth and letters should be so provided for, that he may abide in the "quiet and still air of his delightful studies," and not be dragged forth to struggle in the work-house of the world for his daily bread. Then as to the respectful appreciation of his labours by his fellow men. The man of genius is a man; and therefore feels the want of human sympathy. He may glow with a pure and fervent love of truth and beauty; he may have a calm and self-sustained conviction that he is not living in vain, nor

for himself alone, but is working in a high vocation to which he is called of God ; he may have a serene and lofty confidence in the sentence of succeeding times ;—yet he will often feel a discouraging sense of loneliness, if he sees himself the object of disregard or depreciation among his fellow men ; and on the other hand, he will be cheered and quickened by knowing that the respectful thoughts and kind feelings of his cotemporaries are with him in his labours. Thus we see that genius may be repressed, and rendered fruitless to the world, if it is left a prey to the cares of life, or the sense of disregard. Here then lies the need of State Endowments—places of dignified labour and ample provision for a body of men devoted to the highest interests of science and letters.

The State is the proper power to form and sustain a learned order. The state is the power that can most adequately cherish the cause of lofty science and learning. It does this, not by creating genius, not by communicating a love of truth and letters for their own sake ; but by making such provision that these impulses may have free scope. Government can supply a place for a learned order to work in ; and can put honor on their work in the eyes of the multitude. The multitude honors what it sees honored by the State. In this country, above all others on the globe, men of science and letters have no place, no position, in the social system. The respect paid to wealth and

public office engrosses all the respect that in other countries is awarded to high letters. The multitude in this country, so far from favouring and honouring high learning and science, is rather prone to suspect and dislike it. It feareth that Genius savoureth of aristocracy! Besides, the multitude calleth itself a *practical* man. It asketh: *what is the use?* It seeth no use but in that which leads to money, or the material ends of life. It hath no opinion of having dreamers and drones in society. It believeth indeed in rail-roads; it thinketh well of steam; and owneth that the new art of bleaching by chlorine is a prodigious improvement;—but it laughs at the profound researches into the laws of nature, out of which those very inventions grew; and with still greater scorn it laughs at the votaries of the more spiritual forms of truth and beauty, which have no application to the palpable uses of life. Then, again, the influence of our reading public is not favourable to high letters. It demands, it pays for, and respects, almost exclusively, a lower style of production; and hence a natural influence to discourage higher labours. As old SPENSER sang, two hundred years ago:

If that any buds of poesy
 Yet of the old stock, 'gin shoot again,
 'Tis or self-lost the worldling's meed to gain,
 And with the rest to breathe its ribauldry,—
 Or, as it sprung, it wither must again;
Tom Piper makes them better melody!

The State then ought to cherish high science and

letters by endowments, for two reasons : first, in order to supply to a learned order of men such a competent provision as will leave them free to devote their powers exclusively to lofty study and production ; secondly, in order to develope in the people a proper feeling of respect for the importance of such labors, by the honor it puts upon them.* Something of this is done in other countries. A learned order is, to some extent, recognized and sustained as one of the integral elements of the commonwealth. In the *theory*, at least, of the British constitution, which, taken all in all, is wonderfully adapted to human nature as it is, and to the wants of the social condition ; the working of whose machinery may, in the progress of time and change, have become disordered, and need rectifying, but whose dissolution or organic change should be dreaded ;—in the theory of this constitution, the State charges itself with the duty of providing for the good of the people what the people will never provide for themselves. Hence the Cathedral, University, and other Endowments for learning, science and art—places of high honour and trust—designed, in the IDEAL of them, to be filled by the best minds of the land ; where with a modest but dignified provision for life and its wants, surrounded with rich and ample libraries, it becomes their duty to devote themselves

* This is illustrated at considerable length, and set in various lights, in Bulwer's "England and the English."

to the highest departments of truth and letters ; working not with immediate reference to the bulk of the people, but for the teachers of the people—guarding the fountain heads of learning, and opening new springs; promoting thus the good of all—honoured and respected by all, not because all can fully comprehend the meaning and value of their pursuits, but because all see them honoured by the State.

Would that we could hope for some support of a like kind for the intellectual interests of our country. But what has government ever done to cherish these interests? Next to nothing in comparison with their importance and its own means. It has occasionally ordered a picture or a statue ; it has subscribed for a few books. Oh, if a portion of those superfluous millions, whose distribution has created so keen an excitement, could have been devoted to founding and cherishing a great and noble institution for the cultivation of lofty science and letters, what occasion of joy to every lover of the cause, and to every enlightened lover of our country ! Little, however, can at present be expected from government. The action of our government is but the reflection of the popular will ; it has but little power to form and direct the public mind. It will be yet a long time before the country at large is adequately awake to the importance even of primary education. It is pleasant to perceive a growing sense of this ; but the importance

of a generous provision for the cultivation of the higher departments of science and letters is scarcely at all felt. So far, indeed, is the mutual connexion and harmony of the two from being discerned, that there is a disposition on the part of the friends of popular education—even among those who ought to know better—to dislike and oppose the claims of high science and letters. A great change must be wrought in public feeling, before the ample resources of the country will be applied to this great object.

What then remains? Shall the lovers of good letters despair of the cause? Oh no! Let them stir themselves up to a loftier zeal in proportion to the adverse influences that press upon them. Let them mutually quicken in each other those genial impulses which the chill cold atmosphere of the country so tends to repress. Let them brighten the golden chain that unites them. Let a livelier sympathy pervade and animate the whole brotherhood of those who love and honour the cause of truth, beauty, and letters. Let them combine their exertions, and direct them to supplying those fostering influences which the Public and the State withhold.

It is greatly to be regretted that there is not a more intimate connexion among our men of letters; that they meet no more frequently as a class—have no more free communication—and make themselves no more felt as a distinct body and a positive element in

the social system. Perhaps in part it is owing to the want of some such point of common attraction as the capitals of Europe supply ; but more to the fact that those among us who are in any degree devoted to the cultivation of letters, give to its pursuits only the intervals of leisure snatched from the duties and cares of other professions, upon which they are dependent not only for subsistence, but for their social position and consequence. They are thus scattered abroad over the land—isolated, amidst the ungenial influences that surround them, with but little leisure or opportunity to indulge in the sympathies of brotherly communion, and to combine and strengthen their influence for the promotion of high letters.

Would, however, that the love of these great interests, and a sense of their value to the country, might lead to more vigorous and combined exertions to promote them. If I might suggest, in broken hints, the outline of a scheme that I should desire to see embodied—I would say : Let a great association be formed, embracing all who cultivate, and all who appreciate the value of good Learning, lofty Science, and Art. The objects of such a union should be by mutual sympathy, to quicken in each other the love of high letters, and excite to genial production;—to supply, as far as possible, the requisite *material conditions*—the means and appliances—that may give free scope to the impulses of genius ; and to act upon the intellec-

tual spirit of the nation, exalting its tone, developing the power and exciting the disposition to appreciate and cherish the productions of high letters. In imitation of the German Society of Naturalists, let there be an annual Congress of the disciples of letters, held in different places on successive years;—and let not the influence of these meetings die away with the speeches that are made. Let suggestions concerning all the most important *desiderata* in the highest departments of Philosophy, Art, and Letters, be received, carefully weighed by appropriate committees, and discussed in the most catholic spirit;—let prizes be proposed, and works of pre-eminent merit be crowned. But above all, let the most strenuous and unwearied exertions be directed to securing those material provisions which are requisite to create a learned order—to call a portion of the highest talent and genius of the country into the field of science—to sustain a body of high and original cultivators of truth and beauty. Here would be included the foundation of libraries containing the most perfect apparatus for the thorough cultivation of every department of letters, and complete collections in Nature and Art;—and last, but most essential, ENDOWMENTS for the dignified and honourable support of Genius—where, free from life's cares, it may follow the impulses of its nature. Here let all those whom God hath formed for great Poets, great Artists, and great Philosophers, find

every condition and every influence to quicken, unfold, and perfect in themselves the rare and excellent gifts of God. Here "in the quiet and still air of delightful studies," let the sense of Duty unite with the inward promptings of their nature, leading them to work, each in his high vocation, for the glory of God and the honour and instruction of their country and mankind.

If this be but an *idea* that can never be realized, surely it is an idea beautiful to the imagination, and attractive to the wishes of every lover of truth and letters. Even if it cannot be fully realized, something may be done. A beginning may be made by the union and combined influence of the disciples of letters; and they may at length so act upon the intellectual spirit of the country as to secure the fostering influence of the State. At all events, the duty of uniting in the promotion of this great end, rests upon all who love the cause of truth and letters. It rests upon all whom history and reflection have taught to dread for our country the debasing and deadly tendencies of a too intense and absorbing devotion to the mere physical interests of life. It rests upon all who would elevate the intellectual tone of the nation—develop its true humanity—and raise it to the true freedom of virtuous energy. It rests upon all who would secure to our beloved country the permanent possession of its true dignity and proper well-being. There

is no alternative. We must be rich and great. We cannot—like the mountain dwellers of Switzerland and the Alps, the pastoral tribes of Lapland, or the poor inhabitants of Iceland—find in our poverty, and in the influences of religion, those safeguards of our virtue and our welfare, which render the conservative influence of high and pure letters comparatively unimportant. We must be rich and great; and our riches and greatness will inevitably prove our ruin—spite of all that Religion will effect—unless the intellectual spirit of the nation be elevated by the pervading influence of pure Letters, and a Spiritual Philosophy.